3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

"This is how they work. As every one who is acquainted with Muhammadan countries knows, it is a *sawāb* or merit-acquiring action to give alms to any beggar, whether he deserves it or not. Consequently the fraternity flourish even as the green bay tree; also, they hear all that is going on. They therefore make admirable spies and allies for the police. Suppose, then, that an opium-running convoy from Afghanistan is reported by the beggars to be approaching Yarkand. The smugglers always break up into parties of two or three among the foothills above the city and endeavour to enter with their loads by night. The Chief of Police then calls the Chief of the Beggars to his garden outside the city and the two of them concoct a plan of campaign something like this: on the nights when the smugglers are expected the Chief of the Beggars will post parties of his men near the most likely of the many holes in the city walls, with orders to intercept any smugglers they can get hold of and drag them off to the garden of the Chief of Police; the *pashraps* or watchmen are to patrol the streets and environs of the town and do likewise. When the time comes the two Chiefs await the result at the appointed place and divide the spoil, which usually consists of heavy blackmail in kind taken from the captured smugglers.

"Think of the dramas that must be enacted at a place like Yarkand! There must be enough in one year to make plots for a score of 'Hassans.' Everything is there, from the comic rivalry between the Chief of Police and the Captain of the Military, who is represented by the Tungling or (Chinese) commandant of the garrison with his locally-recruited soldiers, to the tyrant Harun-ar-Rashid and his torture-chamber. General Ma, Titai of Kashgaria, with the big hay-chopper with which he slices men's limbs off joint by joint, would play the latter to the life."

The oases of the Tarim Basin are a land flowing with milk and, if not honey, almost everything else. D. has a vivid and by no means overdrawn picture of the Kashgar bazaars in one of her letters home.

"In the autumn the bazaars, always well supplied, positively overflow with things to eat. Millers sit in their shops behind mountains of flour, next door to them grain-merchants squat surrounded by huge sacks of golden corn-cobs, rice, wheat and millet. The vegetable stalls are weighed down with enormous onions, lettuces, cabbages, bundles of spinach and strange local vegetables which are new to us. Even the tinsmiths, the cloth-merchants, the cap-sellers have fruit and vegetables to sell, and at every corner sits some one with baskets of peaches, melons, pomegranates and grapes. Luscious nectarines fall off the stalls and the street-boys do not even trouble to pick them up. Horses and donkeys snatch at bundles of hay or dried lucerne

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but the extreme difficulty of the frontier, and the countless secret paths by which determined men riding ponies like mountain goats can inport the drug, make the prevention of smuggling an impossible task. Also there is the co-operation between the two "Hassan" characters described above.

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as they pass, and nobody minds, for the loss of one or two bundles matters little among so many. In this country everybody seems to be eating all the time. Not only in the town but for miles along the roads leading to it there are wayside food-pedlars every hundred yards, the very poorest of whom has a few handfuls of nuts, slices of melon, and a pomegranate or two to sell; the grander ones have booths or large barrows shaded by umbrella-like canopies of matting and piled up with strange sloppy white sweetmeats and 'mantas,' which are made of minced meat enclosed in thin cases of dough, as well as with the usual melons, peaches and other fruit. No wonder that the Kashgaris are a fat and cheerful race."

The cost of living for Europeans at Kashgar is lower even than it was in India thirty years ago. Wages are absurdly low. The only one of our servants who drew a comparatively high wage was Ahmad Bakhsh, who received 60 rupees (£4) a month because he was an Indian and in exile. Our excellent cook, Daud Akhun, drew 10 taels or £1 6s. 8d.—and other servants in proportion down to honest, smiling Salih Akhun, who did third gardener, kitchen assistant and odd-job man, for the princely sum of 16s. a month. Salih Akhun's manners were delightful; whenever he saw you a grin spread over his rugged face and his right arm moved like clockwork across his lower front in the Turki salute. As for food, here are some of the average prices D. paid in the course of her daily housekeeping:

Meat (excellent mutton every day, beef Thursdays only), 2*d.* per lb.; ox or yak tongues, 8*d.*; kidneys, 5 for 2*d.*

Eggs, 2*d.* a dozen.

Chickens, 4*d.* to 6*d.* according to size; large fat ducks, 8*d.*

Milk, 1*d.* per pint; cream, 8*d.*, from which we made our own butter.

Wheat flour (poor quality), ½*d.* per lb., rice ditto.

Cabbages, 1*d.* each, spinach 1*d.* per lb., potatoes and tomatoes, 2*d.* per lb.

Apricots, in season, per basket of about 3 lb., 1¾*d.*; peaches and nectarines, 2*d.*; grapes, 3*d.*

Dried fruits (apricots, peaches, raisins), 1*d.* per lb.

Game in season: pheasants and wild duck, 6*d.*; teal and partridge, 4*d.*; snow-cock (twice as big as a pheasant), 1*s.* 4*d.*

Fresh fish was an item which often appeared on D.'s menus, the best kind being the *asman-belek* or "heaven-fish," which is very much the same as the "mahseer" of India, and is found in both the rivers which flow past Kashgar, the Qizil Su and